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SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: EFFECTIVENESS OF UNOCI EFFORTS TO COMBAT
SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

REF: 09 STATE 130760; 09 ABIDJAN 378; 08 ABIDJAN 440

1. (U) Per ref A, post consulted with the UN Operation in Cote d'Ivoire's (UNOCI) Conduct and Discipline Office, the Ministry of Family, and Save the Children UK on whether UNOCI is effectively preventing sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and trafficking in persons (TIP).

2. (SBU) Maria Rocheteau, acting UNOCI Conduct and Discipline Chief, told Poloff there were five SEA cases in 2009, down from 13 cases in 2008. No cases in 2009 involved minors. In addition to providing required SEA training to over 8,000 UNOCI civilians and peacekeepers, her office conducts around three field visits per month. The office tries to visit every peacekeeping battalion at least twice during their deployment. However, due to severe staffing gaps, this is not always possible. Staffing shortages have meant that the anti-SEA public awareness campaign planned for July 2009 (ref B) has not yet taken place. There has been some progress on a victim assistance strategy, however - a working group made up of UN agencies, the Ivoirian government, and NGOs has started meeting regularly. Rocheteau noted that more staff and resources could substantially increase her office's effectiveness.

3. (SBU) Fanta Coulibaly, the Director of the National Committee Against Violence Against Women at the Ministry of Family, says UNOCI is "very involved" when cases of abuse are initially discovered, but is weak on follow-up support when babies are born from peacekeeper liaisons. Regarding the 2007 SEA cases involving Moroccan peacekeepers, the Ministry of Family is still waiting to be notified of DNA paternity test results. [Note: Rocheteau told Poloff on January 12 that final reports on these allegations have been completed, and the peacekeepers in question have already been tried in Moroccan courts.] Coulibaly suggested that deploying more female staff with peacekeeping contingents could have a deterrent effect on SEA.

4. (SBU) Yann Grandin, a protection officer with Save the Children UK (SCUK), told Poloff on January 13 that the SEA problem among UNOCI personnel is more extensive than is recognized. In December 2009, SCUK randomly polled 10 underage girls living in Toulepleu (western Cote d'Ivoire) in a neighborhood known as "Cotonou," since it is heavily frequented by Beninese peacekeepers. Eight of the 10 girls freely admitted they had ongoing sexual relationships with Beninese soldiers in exchange for food or lodging. Follow-up interviews with parents and hospital staff in "Cotonou" revealed that girls go back to their villages and tell others about their "boyfriends," which encourages other parents to push their daughters to find someone who will provide for them. SCUK is currently examining the possibility of doing a study to determine the depth of the problem.

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